



Pakistan Perspective

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M. A. Qadeer

Pakistan Perspective

This is the year of general elections in Pakistan. Elections, which have been eluding us so far, are likely to be a reality this year. Though the date of elections has been shifted from Oct. 5th to Dec. 7th, due to floods in East Pakistan, yet it is clear that President Yahya is committed to see this event happen. Arrangements are being made to hold elections in some mountainous parts of Frontier and Baluchistan provinces during the month of October before the beginning of winter. The election arrangements for the rest of the country are also proceeding with visible dispatch. The political scene is certainly reassuring. It has the energy, noise and activity, seldom witnessed before.

Pakistani politics basically revolves around regional issues and personal loyalties. This time only the mood and methods are different. Political promotional efforts have assumed the form of ideological crusades. The debate between 'Islamic Socialists' and 'Islamists' is loud; issues divisive but tactics similar. This is particularly true for West Pakistan. In East Pakistan, the issues of regional disparity and class differentiation are almost indistinguishable, therefore the goal of provincial autonomy has become an over-riding concern. Apart from these general trends, our political behavior betrays some interesting common patterns.

One of the most common political arguments is to allude to a conspiracy on the part of one's opponents, real or imagined. A glance at any issue of a Pakistani newspaper is enough to 'convince' that all events in Pakistan are 'caused' by some internal or external intrigue. We must be the most helpless and gullible people in the world. Supposedly everybody can mislead us and we have no mind of our own. At least this is what our 'leaders' tell us. Otherwise how could "conspirators" cause all the problems we are faced with. But the irony of such a disposition is that no group or country has been spared of blame. Americans, Chinese, Russians, Indians, Hindus, Jews, Bengalis, Punjabis, Socialists and Islamists; each one of them has been burdened with our failures. To our 'know-all' leaders, such forces as population growth, bureaucratic incompetence, youth's restlessness, technology, economic disparity, and genuine differences of beliefs have no significance; they cannot think beyond personalities and groups. To think in terms of ideas and social forces is 'subversive westernism' to say the least, but, often it is Unislamic. So much are our leaders haunted by the conspiracy theory that, even, common sense is a burden for them. Recently an old Muslim Leaguer has 'found' that Bengali students have been 'brain-washed' into socialist beliefs by their Hindu professors (Dawn, Aug. 12). Logic and statistics are too confining for the unbridled imagination of this leader. To be bothered with such lowly activity as to find from university bulletins the number of Hindu professors before spinning out the grand theory may be a shattering exercise for our erstwhile leader. Of course the question as to how much influence professors can have over his students is another issue.

Only the illogicality and fantasticalness of reform programs surpass the conspiracy theme in political utterances. Confederation with neighboring countries (no matter what they think); banning family planning (irrespective of its bureaucratisation and consequent failure); making atom bomb; modelling our life after Saudi Arabia or Morocco are just a sample from proposals of similar thought content.. What social and economic forces are causing a problem, how to direct and channel them, and what would be a logical course to do so? These questions are being by-passed in favor of fantastic claims and irrelevant programs.

New claimants of public leadership are appearing like mushrooms after rains. The roles are new, but the faces are familiar. Numerous former Generals, Air-Marshals, ministers, secretaries, CSP's, and judges have come out of their comfortable retirements. Outpouring of their much publicized wisdom and unabashed display of their service titles are a stunning spectacle. These so called lovers of democracy do not see the obvious contradiction between their new and the past roles. On the contrary they proudly display their former service titles. This is a new form of tribalism. Claim for leadership still rests on one's elite status, except this time, the legitimacy is provided by the service title. The pattern remains unaffected. It is the status that prompts an opinion and not an idea that bestows the status. Amusing are their political affiliations; which also are a commentary on the ideological commitment of the respective parties. A famous civil servant and Ayub's minister has joined the left-leaning N.A.P. (Wali Khan) and many former Generals are singing glories of their past roles from platforms of such diverse parties as Muslim League, PDP, Awami League, and Jamat-e-Islami. What does all this mean? 'Confusion', 'tamasha',

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The recent events in the Middle East, beginning with the acceptance of American "peace" plan by Jordan and Egypt and leading upto a massacre of Palestinians by Jordanian forces, were a grim reminder of the dangers faced by the Arab revolution. After twenty years of betrayal by all quarters, the Palestinian people began to act according to the lessons of the history, i.e. no people can achieve freedom without fighting for it, and no other power – no matter how sympathetic – can substitute that struggle. The lessons of Algerian revolution were also quite fresh for the Palestinians and they realized that the freedom struggle needs to be waged not only against the direct oppressor but also against the entire brotherhood of international imperialism and its lackeys. Yet, the Palestinians chose not to confront the latter two rightaway and concentrated their energies on fighting Israel. But when the Egyptian and Jordanian governments succumbed to the big power pressure, it was the time for the fedayeen to let it be known that no one has the right to barter away their freedom, for the U. S. and U.S.S.R. envisage a "peace" for the region which will guarantee the existence of Israel and leave the Palestinians as a nation without its land. The multiple hijacking, and later on destruction, of planes was only a logical response of determined people being forced to surrender their struggle. There is nothing new or astonishing about it. The founding fathers of the nation, advocating sanctity of private property, were also the destroyers of other people's property. If Boston tea party and destruction of British goods in colonial Virginia could be justified and glorified, what is wrong with Palestinian people using the same means for their freedom?

The American condemnation of the fedayeen is obviously not motivated by a small issue like the plane hijacking by the Popular Front. The popularity and success of Palestinian revolution threatens the vested interests of the United States which controls more than 60% of the oil of the region and sponsors three puppet Arab regimes in addition to its fifth column, the Israel. It is not surprising, then, that the American sixth fleet was ready to reenact the drama of Lebanon, Congo, and Dominican republic, where U.S. intervention took place to "save American lives" and ended with frustrating the freedom struggles of these peoples. A handy excuse of repelling outside "aggression" was also ready to justify invasion: the villain this time being Syria instead of North Viet Nam.

But it seems that neither U.S. nor Israel needs to take any risk in order to annihilate the Palestinian patriots. The Jordanian monarchy has decided to play its historical role and has already exterminated tens of thousands of civilians and fedayeen. For this valour it is being generously congratulated by the U.S. and Israel and portrayed as a victor by American press. The U.S. has also announced a reward for Hussain in the form of replenishing all the armament lost in the battle. Moshe Dayan has publicly stated that he likes Hussain. The birds of the feather have flocked together. The truce worked out by the other Arab leaders may last for some time, but the message of the latest events has not been lost on the freedom fighters, i.e. the Arab dawn will usher not only with the creation of a Palestinian republic instead of a Zionist state but also with the liquidation of the antiquated Jordanian monarchy and the living fossil of Saudi Arabia, the bastions of international imperialist intrigue.

Feroz Ahmed

'political game' or 'instability'; these are the spontaneous reactions of an educated, uninvolved and relatively successful middle-class Pakistani. And if he happens to be a superior civil servant, then the art is to convey one's privileged understanding through silence or disgust for the political processes.

Not notwithstanding bureaucratic stereotyping and middle class apathy, the chaos of elections is necessary and welcome. For us there is no alternative to the public control of political power, precisely because other forms of power relationships have been tried and they have failed. Given the line up of political forces and the level of national debate, one cannot say that elections will solve our problems. But another decade of delusions will be more disastrous. Our fundamental task is to create a political mechanism for the expression of people's demands and establish answerability of the power holders. This will, now, be attained through repeated elections only.

Without elections there will be, perhaps, more chaos. This is the time for the educated middle class to show commitment and concern. It is not the time to hide behind pseudo 'above-it-all' attitude. It is the educated middle class which has to challenge the shoddy political thinking and make the politicians responsible for their utterances. We need a social climate where opinions can freely interact with each other, rather be suppressed in the name of religion, ideology or bureaucratic sensibilities. Such a social climate can be promoted by firm refusal to be swayed by allusions of conspiracies, catchy slogans and calls of danger to Islam.